

ENHANCING COMPETITIVE IDENTITY IN GLOBAL COMPETITION: A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF GASTRODIPLOMACY IN MALAYSIA AND SOUTH KOREA

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Abstrak: Perekonomian dunia tengah mengalami perubahan-perubahan yang transformatif dan signifikan, dimana hal ini memberikan ruang dan kesempatan lebih bagi negara untuk bermanuver dalam forum internasional. Meskipun demikian, di saat yang sama, perubahan-perubahan tersebut telah mempertajam persaingan yang makin ketat antar negara dalam hal pendapatan, investasi, dan juga ekspansi ekspor. Dalam konteks ini, peranan identitas yang kompetitif sebagai pendaya-gunaan identitas nasional untuk meningkatkan reputasi suatu negara dilaksanakan untuk mendukung negara tersebut dalam kompetisi ekonomi dunia. Negara-negara dengan identitas kompetitif yang kuat akan mampu bersaing dengan lebih baik dalam ekonomi politik global. Malaysia dan Korea Selatan adalah contoh dari negara-negara dengan kekuatan menengah yang mampu menggunakan identitas kompetitif mereka untuk memperkuat keberadaan dan pengaruh mereka dalam persaingan ekonomi dunia. Kedua negara tersebut telah mengembangkan Gastrodiplomasi mereka sebagai sarana untuk melaksanakan diplomasi budaya dan diplomasi publik yang mendukung kebijakan ekonomi mereka pada tingkat internasional. Tulisan ini akan mengidentifikasi dan menjelaskan perkembangan Gastrodiplomasi sebagai wujud baru dari diplomasi publik dan diplomasi budaya dengan menjadikan Malaysia dan Korea Selatan sebagai studi kasus.

Kata Kunci: Gastrodiplomasi, Identitas Kompetitif, *Nation Branding*, Persaingan Global

Introduction

The world economy today is transforming toward a more multipolar character, the distribution of global growth and global economic scene is

more diffused and no longer dominated by a single country. In this changing international scene, all State actors in the global economy sphere can all play a part. The emergence of developing economies, such as China, India and Brazil, proves that the world economic order is shifting compared to the bipolarity in the second half of the twentieth century. This major transition presents a challenge which comes in the form of a tighter global competition setting, where States are able to contribute larger to their growth and pursuing to gain more international presence. As described by Simon Anholt (2011), they are now competing to “*pull in* (investors, aid, tourists, business visitors, students, major events, researchers, travel writers, and talented entrepreneurs) and *push out* (products, services, policies, culture, and ideas).”

States now needs to adjust to the appropriate mindset and provides policies and institutional responses to accommodate the changes and produce better outcomes. Anholt (2011) argues that States often find it hard to navigate in this globalized and multipolar world because the current global situation favors those with strong competitive identity.¹ Realizing that stronger competitive identity is advantageous, States find that it can be achieved by helping people in other countries to get to know them, by increasing and celebrating rather than reduce their own complexity (Anholt, 2011). Therefore, States are now employing approaches towards the world

¹ Competitive identity refers to the development and use of national identity and the politics and economics of competitiveness to shape national image or reputation. The term is used to describe the synthesis of brand management with public diplomacy and with trade, investment, and tourism and export promotion. It is used to replace the term “nation branding” as suggested by Simon Anholt. Anholt (2011) argues that the use of the term nation branding has shifted in the meaning to a shallow branding project, instead of a comprehensive approach on product and overall development that he originally intended and aimed at. Thus, the replacement with a more comprehensive term: competitive identity.

through the demonstrably effective form of achieving better image, which is by projecting their unique cultural national identity through public diplomacy. One of the recent trends is by putting focus of their public diplomacy effort in the cultural field of gastronomy.² Hence, mainstreaming the term *gastrodiplomacy*.

1. Defining Gastrodiplomacy

According to Paul Rockower who coined the term, gastrodiplomacy is the act of winning hearts and minds through stomach. Gastrodiplomacy lies at the intersection of food and foreign policy; it uses a country's culinary delights as a means to conduct public diplomacy and to raise nation brand awareness, especially for middle powers.³ Gastrodiplomacy was born out of pinpointing the case studies in the field of culinary cultural diplomacy as in how to use food to communicate culture in public diplomacy context (Rockower, 2014). This means that when traditional public diplomacy campaigns are based on tactics of advocacy attempt to influence directly, gastrodiplomacy seeks to win hearts and minds through emotional connection by using food as a medium for cultural engagement.

Gastrodiplomacy, however, needs to be distinguished with other cultural diplomacy that uses food, such as culinary diplomacy and food diplomacy. According to Rockower (2014), culinary diplomacy is the use of food for diplomatic pursuits and as a medium to enhance formal diplomacy in official diplomatic functions, such as visits by heads-of-state,

² Gastronomy is defined as culinary customs and style (Merriam-Webster Dictionary).

³ Middle powers refers to the fair class of state that neither reign on high superpowers nor reside at the shallow end of international power dynamic, but exist somewhere in the vast muddled middle of the global community (Cooper, Andrew Fenton et al (1993) as cited in Rockower (2014) on Public Diplomacy Magazine).

ambassadors, and other dignitaries. Culinary diplomacy seeks to increase bilateral ties by strengthening relationships through the use of food and dining experiences as a means to engage visiting dignitaries. Food diplomacy, on the other hand, is the use of food aid and food relief in a crisis or catastrophe. Gastrodiploamacy, in comparison, is a public diplomacy attempt to communicate culinary culture to foreign public or masses, not only the high-level elites, and a long term effort instead of a one-off program.

2. Malaysia's Gastrodiploamacy

Malaysia has been the spice trading hub of Malacca which has successfully lured in many European countries to come to the Strait of Malacca. Malaysia is home to diverse groups of ethnics, such as Malay, Chinese, and Indian, which makes Malaysia a melting pot of races and religions as well as a food paradise. This unique country with two land masses spread out the nation geographically also has a strategic location among the rising middle-class consumers of South East Asia. Since its independence in 1957, Malaysia has been favorably growing economically as proven by its robust economic growth. It has been transforming from a raw materials producer in 1970s into an emerging multi-sector economy as it is today. However, the regional competition Malaysia faces is tight as South East Asia now represents the region with thriving trade and economic hub. According to the Country Brand Index research conducted by Future Brand, Malaysia placed on the 48th place out of 75 countries, and ranked the 10th out of 17 countries in Asia Pacific, lagging behind Singapore and Thailand. According to Brand Finance® Nation Brands 100 in 2011, Malaysia placed number 33rd, beaten by Indonesia. Overall, Malaysia's national image is increasing in value. However, its other South East Asian counterparts are

also growing, such as Indonesia, the Philippines and Vietnam. It is also sometimes overshadowed by its neighbor, Singapore, which has stronger national image. Former Minister of Trade and Industry of Malaysia, Tan Sri Rafidah Aziz, mentioned that Malaysia needs to recreate the country's image to "convey the message that Malaysia is a well-governed nation" to "meet the demands of an increasingly competitive and challenging global environment."

Several attempts in establishing an attractive image of Malaysia have been done by the Government. In 1999, Malaysia launched the "Malaysia Truly Asia" campaign to market their tourism. "Malaysia Can" acted as the tagline for mid 1990s. There were also "Generating Transformation," "Transformation Successful, People Prosperous," and other tagline that changes annually since 2010 (Dinnie, 2015). However, as Dinnie also outlined, Malaysia has learned the hard way that developing a nation brand requires much more than just tagline, advertisement, or another government-driven corporate communication.

General Overview of Malaysia's Gastrodiplomacy

The gastrodiplomacy of Malaysia was run under the campaign Malaysia Kitchen Programme (MKP) with the title "Malaysia Kitchen for the World" by the Malaysia External Trade Development Corporation (MATRADE). "Malaysia Kitchen for the World" is a global initiative of the government of Malaysia that aims to educate and inform consumers about Malaysian cuisine and Malaysian restaurants throughout the world. Established in 2010, MKP is the spearhead of Malaysia's gastrodiplomacy. It is expected to enhance the opportunities for trade in products spanning from food (which include food ingredients and agriculture products) to non-food

(kitchen equipment and appliances, *halal* supplies for industries) and ultimately services (attracting tourists to Malaysia). The current target market for the MKP is the USA, UK, Australia, and China.

Initially, Malaysia's gastrodiploamacy debuted in 2006 and only focused on *halal* food in Muslim countries. Then in 2010, the MKP was launched with more variety of Malaysian cuisine, exploring the cultural richness from the various ethnics and assimilation in Malaysia. Malaysia hosts 2 important annual events in *halal* industry, which are the Malaysia International Halal Showcase (MIHAS) and World Halal Forum (WHF). MATRADE plays a role in the development of *halal* industry to provide the platform for businesses to find markets for their products and services overseas. MIHAS has become an annual event that brings income for Malaysia. In 2015, MIHAS has registered total sales of RM 443.16 million. Besides that, they have aimed on expanding their *halal* industry to Japan, in regards to the 2020 Olympic in Japan, by grooming 500 small and medium enterprises (SMEs). They see an opening that the event will be attended by many Muslim countries – around 30% –, participants, and guests.

Gastrodiploamacy by the Government of Malaysia

a. Food Products

Malaysia, through the MKP, provides help for Malaysian restaurants and foreign owned restaurants serving Malaysian cuisine abroad from the consultation, finding the partners and networks, promotion guidance, up until the technicalities, such as the on-site selection, outlet design, menu design, trainings, and products development (Zhang, 2015). The MKP provides restaurateurs help in promotional support, such as being featured

in reviews by food writers and bloggers along with exposure in Malaysia's gastronomic events, and financial facilities, such as ease of credit for restaurateurs.

In 2006, Malaysia embarked on a campaign to brand Malaysia as the center for *halal* food. In its "Malaysia Kitchen for the World" campaign, one of the distinct cuisine emphasized is Peranakan cuisine. Peranakan food was born out of the assimilation of Chinese and Malay flavor (Rockower, 2012). Peranakan cuisine presented includes *asam laksa* (sour tamarind fish soup with white noodles), curry *laksa* (noodles served in creamy coconut-curry broth), satay (pieces of marinated meat skewered on sticks and grilled over a charcoal fire), *roti canai* (Indian-inspired unleavened bread dipped in a rich soupy chicken-based curry sauce), and beef *rendang* (beef chunks simmered in spicy and sweet coconut milk).⁴

Taking advantage of the food truck craze in the USA, MKP set up food truck in New York. In 2011, MKP set up Malaysian street food fair for six weeks throughout October to November. The Malaysia Kitchen Food Truck stopped by the busiest city streets and squares, from Madison Square Park and Bryant Park to Union Square and Columbus Circle, Elmhurst and Queens. Malaysian restaurants in New York were also cooperating in handing out free samples of Malaysian food. The MKP in the USA has made Malaysian food products increasing in popularity. In 2014, Malaysian food managed to become the top five trending flavors in the USA, and is expected to grow in the following year.

Promoting the uniqueness, Malaysia campaigned by selling durian, introducing it as the world's smelliest fruit. In 2014, the Malaysian variety of

⁴ Due to its assimilating culture, some of Malaysian food are contested as they are rooted from Malay, Indian, and Chinese culture.

durian was put on sale for the first time in the UK. MKP worked with MasterChef UK winner and chef, Tim Anderson, to create recipes using durian. In 2015, Malaysian Gourmet Cultural Festival Roadshow in Qiandong, PRC, durian is also gaining fans. People who dislikes the smell and the fruit itself can experience the taste of durian in a new form of ice cream and durian puffs.

b. Events and Places

In promoting Malaysian cuisine, MALAYSIA held food events, such as “Malaysia Night” night market in Trafalgar Square, UK, annually – the year 2015 was their 6th year. The visitors, with the number reaching 60,000, were able to sample Malaysian eateries in an affordable price and hand-pick their own Malaysian cooking ingredients. Every year, the event serves special menu of food and drinks. There was also cooking demo by celebrity chefs and Malaysian entertainment to create an ambience of the sights and sounds of Malaysia. In May 2015, Malaysia Kitchen Spring Market was held where visitors could learn to recreate Malaysian dishes and buy authentic Malaysian ingredients.

Besides that, Malaysia also held annual Malaysian restaurant week in New York, New Jersey, and Connecticut in 2011. During the restaurant week, MATRADE collaborates with the Malaysian restaurant partners, such as Fatty Crab, Laut, Nyonya, Penang, and the restaurant partners in the region. There are food samplings, and Malaysian food and products at special price. Partnering with LUCKYRICE Festival in 2011, Malaysian Pavillion in the night market hosted a grand feast culinary showcase and talk+taste chef demo. Malaysia Noodle Festival was also held in the busy Meatpacking District in New York City, USA.

In Australia, Malaysia sponsored “The Story of Malaysia” event in Sydney and the “Taste of Malaysia” festival in Melbourne, Australia. The “Taste of Malaysia” in Melbourne is one of MKP’s leading Malaysian food events in Australia. The success of the food events has managed to reap a total of US\$300 million of food export to Australia in 2014. Besides that, through Malaysia Kitchen Group Summit, MKP gathered 13 most popular food bloggers in Australia to review Malaysian restaurants around Australia. Based on the “Likes” as votes, three most liked bloggers would win a gastronomic food tour of Malaysia.

Malaysia also sponsored a month-long *May-laysia* event in New Zealand in 2011. They conducted cooking demonstration by foodie Peta Mathias and Auckland Malaysian chef Youges Subramaniam at the Nosh Food Market where the guests can learn and recreate Malaysian dishes, such as *roti canai*, chicken curry, *mee goreng*, and beef *rendang*. MKP is currently expanding aggressively, especially to China. Recently in 2015, they has just launched the “Taste of Malaysia” in China World Hotel. Besides in China, the “Taste of Malaysia” food sampling and cooking demonstration was also held in Tesco stores in the UK. This year, they also held 3-week long Malaysian Food Festival in Shanghai, where they promoted Malaysian fine dining.

Besides the target country-based event, MKP also joined international expos, such as the Milan Expo and one of the largest food and beverages showcase, the Japan Foodex Fair. Malaysian food products promoted MIHAS in the Japan Foodex Food Fair were gaining favorable welcome by the Japanese. The processed food products of Malaysia saw a 32.7% increase in export comparing year 2013’s RM467.4 million to year 2014’s RM620.3 million. MKP also collaborated with the other government sectors by joining

cultural expos and events conducted. In 2015, MKP joined by presenting Malaysian food and delicacies in Malaysia Cultural Week in Paris.

c. Partnership and Media

Malaysia set up a website for MKP to promote different Malaysian recipes and the list of the location of where to find Malaysian cuisine around the world. Malaysia used social media, such as Facebook (Malaysia Kitchen Global) and Twitter (@Miss_Sambal) to spread the promotion and information regarding the Malaysian Kitchen events and activities, such as food truck, food and restaurants reviews. Besides that, they also partner with Starwood Group⁵ to provide the Starwood Preferred Guests with VIP access to Malaysian dining experience.

Other than that, Malaysia managed to cooperate with internationally acclaimed restaurants and dining review, Michelin guide, to review Malaysian restaurants abroad. Mamak Malaysia, New Malaysia, Fatty Crab, Nyonya, and Laut are the five Malaysian-styled restaurants to earn the Bib Gourmand designation from Michelin. Malaysia also cooperates with their network of registered Malaysian restaurants overseas to help join their events and promote Malaysian food products.

⁵ Starwood Hotels and Resorts Worldwide, Inc. is one of the leading hotel and leisure companies in 100 countries with more than 1,270 properties. Starwood is the owner, operator and franchisor of several renowned brands, such as St. Regis®, Sheraton®, Westin®, Le Meridien®, and W®. (from Starwood Hotels and Resorts official website www.starwoodhotels.com)

d. Education

MALAYSIA conducted cooking classes with celebrities teaching how to cook Malaysian cuisine. Cooking demonstration with celebrity chefs in many events abroad is used to teach people to recreate Malaysian cuisine. One of the successful examples is for 2015 Christmas, MKP initiated a television show “Christmas a-la Malaysia” in New York to learn how to create a Thanksgiving and Christmas food with Malaysian ingredients and promoted the health benefits of using them. The two-month campaign show received pretty good feedback. Also, the amount of Malaysian food product sold through amazon.com and buymalaysiafood.com is seeing an increase.

e. Strategic People

Malaysia used well-known foodies, food writers and bloggers to help contribute to Malaysian cuisine recipe and reviews. Famous food editors and columnists were also given a tour around Malaysia through the competition of reviewing Malaysian food. As a part of the campaign, Malaysia brought top Malaysian chefs to cook Malaysian cuisine at food fairs and food-tasting events. Malaysian MasterChef Australia winner, Adam Liaw, is also recruited to cook for Malaysia Kitchen. In 2011, Liaw served at the Malaysia Kitchen private dinner. Besides Liaw, Alvin Quah, a finalist of MasterChef Australia of Chinese-Malaysian heritage, is working as an ambassador for Malaysia Kitchen campaign. In the UK, MATRADE collaborated with Cactus TV to run a series of Malaysian Adventure with John Torode aimed for 2016 premiere, in which he travels throughout Malaysia, cooks with local chefs, meets celebrity restaurateurs, visits night markets, and explores the evolution of Malaysian food culture.

3. South Korea's Gastrodiplomacy

South Korea has been undergoing a strategically coordinated rebranding program initiated under former President Lee Myung Bak in 2009. This branding program was an effort to increase South Korea's soft power capital and to add the country's attractiveness. South Korea have gained the awareness of the discrepancy between the economic success of their country and its image towards the rest of the world (Ih-Prost and Bondaz, 2014). Over the past decades, South Korea has experienced incredible growth and became a high-tech industrialized economy, compared to the South Korea in the 1960s where its GDP per capita was comparable with the levels in the poorer countries in Africa and Asia. Now, South Korea is currently the 12th largest economy in the world. However, despite its rapid growth and advancement into modernization, South Korea had not invested in improving its national image. Therefore, the national image of South Korea was outdated and undervalued. This was reflected negatively to Korean-made products, which was noted as the "Korea Discount" effect, which forced the prices of Korean products to be rated 66% to 67% of the identical product made in the U.S., which has better image valuation. In the early 21st century, the image of South Korea in Europe and the U.S. was often associated with North Korea and its provocations and Korean War (Kim, 2011).

In his presidential speech in 2008, former President Lee Myung Bak also backed and addressed the reality that the advancement of the South Korea did not get reflected in the international image they received. South Korea is also in need for distinction with its neighbors. This distinction is important for South Korea since the regional power of China and Japan is

strong and difficult to outshine (Pham, 2013). A simple example is that South Korean brands are often mistaken as Japanese brands, such as Samsung. A study published by Korea Trade Investment Promotion Agency in 2009 showed that Westerners, aside from the association of South Korea to the nuclear crisis in North Korea, are unaware of Korean companies. Only 36% of Americans and 54% of Europeans knew that Samsung is a Korean brand, while 80% of Asians knew. Between 2005 and 2008, the image of South Korea was also experiencing a decline, shown from the slump from rank 25th to 33rd based on the Anholt-GfK NBI.

Before the national rebranding program coordinated by former President Lee Myung-bak, several administrations had placed a concern over the national image. In 2002, South Korea partnered up with Japan to host the FIFA World Cup. The administration of former President Kim Dae-jung developed the concept of “Dynamic Korea,” and former President Roh Moo-hyun expressed his willingness to make South Korea into a “cultural superpower” and established the Committee for Nation Branding, which becomes the predecessor of Presidential Council on Nation Brand. Since Lee Myung-bak was elected as the president, the effort to improve South Korea’s image is rapidly advancing. From the establishment of Presidential Council on Nation Brand to World Friends Korea, promotion of Korean language and taekwondo, and through the use of South Korea’s success in cultural entertainment industry, Hallyu, prompted by PSY’s Gangnam Style song that went viral over the internet.

General Overview of South Korea’s Gastrodiplomacy

Through the rebranding program, South Korea exploited its cultural assets into actions. One of the ways to achieve South Korea’s desired image

as an attractive middle power and global economic powerhouse is by using gastrodiploamacy, building of a recognizable identity through Korean food (Pham, 2013). Through the gastrodiploamacy engagement, South Korea aims to distinguish South Korea from its neighbors. “Korean Cuisine to the World” is the title of the program launched in 2009 and funded by the Ministry of Food, Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries (MFAFF) while managed by Korean Food Foundation (KFF). The Foundation, established in March 2010, directly supervises the campaign, and is expected to serve as the pillar of the gastrodiploamacy by South Korea. KFF serves to become the pivotal institution through which the government can implement program and changes, while also measure the progress (Pham, 2013).

The aim of the gastrodiploamacy program is to globalize *hansik*, or Korean food, to appeal to foreign palates (Pham, 2013). The Director of the KFF, Kim Hong-wu, expressed that the campaign’s goals are to generate more employment opportunities in the food industry, fostering Korean culinary experts, increasing exports of Korean food and agricultural product, and enhancing Korea’s national brand. The direct impact the program seeks is to increase the number of Korean restaurants overseas to 40,000 and making *hansik* one of the world’s top five cuisine by 2017. At the frontline of the program is Korean renowned side-dish fermented cabbage, *kimchi*. Therefore, South Korea’s gastrodiploamacy is often called the “Kimchi Diplomacy.” South Korea has reportedly spent \$77 million for “Korean Cuisine to the World” campaign (Pham, 2013).

This is the very first coordinated attempt to introduce Korean food culture to the foreign palates. Before, Korean restaurants abroad were only targeted to the Korean living overseas. Therefore, Korean restaurants abroad seemed exclusive and not very welcoming for non-Koreans. The food

served was also pure Korean traditional food, which may be unsuitable to non-Korean taste. As Matt Rodbard, a contributing editor of Food Republic, mentioned, that before the Koreans just did not care to play catch up, compared to the its neighbor with the Japanese cuisine that started its boom in 1990s. He added that Korean restaurants were more of a “clubby environment, for Koreans, by Koreans. There wasn’t really much of an effort to draw in non-Korean guests.”

Gastrodiplomacy by the Government of South Korea

a. Food Products

In 2012, South Korea successfully lobbied the UN Codex Alimentarius Commission⁶ to recognize the English name for “Chinese cabbage” that is used to make *kimchi* into “*kimchi* cabbage.” It is also in progress to register other *hansik*. In 2009, they have registered *gochujang* (Korean chili paste) and *doenjang* (Korean soybean paste). *Kimchi*-making, or *kimjang*, has successfully entered the UNESCO List of Intangible Cultural Heritage in 2013.

South Korea, through the KFF, also encourages scientific research on traditional Korean food and the variation of Korean fusion cuisine to better suit the foreign palates. Seoul’s Paik Hospital and University of Sydney’s Concord Hospital has published joint research on the effectiveness of Korean food for dieting (Pham, 2013). South Korea also campaigned by claiming the healthiness of *hansik* (Zhang, 2015). The campaign has also established a research and development lab for Korea’s own popular street-food snack,

⁶ UN Codex Alimentarius Commission, or The Codex, was created by the Food and Agriculture and World Health Organization of the UN in 1963 to develop food standard, guidelines, and related text.

tteokbokki (rice cakes with red chili paste). Through the researches, South Korea maps the trend and how Korean food can adjust with the foreign taste without losing its uniqueness. In adjusting itself to the foreign palates, several efforts in making the food name more familiar are attempted. For example, they change the name of *soondae*, or blood sausage, into Korean black pudding in the UK to be accepted better by the target public (Zhang, 2015).

In Korean restaurants abroad, South Korea helped to improving their taste and upgrade their image. The former Vice Minister of the MFAFF said that these restaurants have lowered prices, provided a cleaner dining environment, improved customer services and their business through media. South Korea also set global recommended Korean restaurant scheme, which includes the national qualification system for overseas Korean restaurants. Therefore, the quality of Korean food offered overseas goes hand in hand with the quantity. South Korea provides government grants for consultations on the expansion of Korean restaurants overseas (Pham, 2013). One of the major beneficiaries and participants in the campaign is the *bibimbap* (mixed rice dish in a hot stone bowl) restaurant chain owned and managed by South Korea's big food service corporation CJ Foodville, Bibigo. Through Bibigo, South Korea has marketed processed food products such as traditional fermented condiments and frozen dumplings to China, the USA, the UK, Japan, and Singapore. South Korea also smartly use its network of Korean restaurants and store partners overseas to display Korean products on their shelves.

In conducting gastrodiploamacy, South Korea does not forget to read the market and take advantage of the trends. In the campaign expansion in the U.S., Korean fusion food and food truck industry are becoming the

spearhead, due to the increasing number and recent trend of food truck and Korean fusion food in the U.S. and also the television program “The Great Food Truck Race” that includes Korean fusion food truck (Pham, 2013). In 2011, KFF drove its own food truck in New York, USA, and showcased Korean fusion cuisine for the New Yorkers. The Kogi Truck, the first Korean-Mexican fusion food truck to become famous, became a cult phenomenon in Los Angeles. It features fusion food such as *bulgogi* taco and *kimchi* quesadillas (LA Times, 2009). Bibigo also had its own food truck going around Los Angeles. Korean taco truck then became synonymous with Korean food craze in the U.S. Besides that, KFF also collaborated with Korean and American chef who specialize in Korean food and served people with *bulgogi* (grilled meat) burger, *kimchi* taco and other Korean fusion food free of charge. KFF also collaborated with local restaurants to serve free Korean food in 25 places in Manhattan five weeks in 2011. Besides *kimchi* taco, Korilla, which is a fusion of *kimchi* in Mexican tortillas is also growing its food fanbase. Korean ingredients are used by Western-style restaurants to attract people. In 2013, Korean flavors entered the Top 10 Food Trends of Forbes, especially due to the fusion food that the American palates became more attuned towards Korean tastes.

b. Events and Places

Since the emergence of Korean Wave, or *Hallyu* Wave, many Korean festivals and conventions are being held by the government in cooperation with private institutions. South Korea used these events opportunities and participated to introduce *hansik*, such as through several of the annual Korean cultural festivals like K-Wave Cultural Festival and K-CON in the U.S.

The introduction to Korean food is also conducted by hosting, serving, and presenting *hansik* at international events. KFF presented *hansik* at “All Eyes on Korea” exhibition in London during the 2012 Olympic, hosted a “100-Year Dinner” in 2014 Davos World Economic Forum (WEF) in 2014 with Bibigo. Every year, WEF is attended by the world’s top economic and financial public figures, entrepreneurs and decision makers. In the 2014 WEF in Switzerland, KFF incorporated Korea Night and served old fermented Korean food, such as a 20-year old fermented soybean paste and 30-year old soy sauce. Besides the strategical importance and attendees of the events joined, South Korea strategically chose and got involved in events held in famous places, such as at the Victoria and Albert Museum in London (UK) to hold dinners with VIPs and chief of 2012 Olympic Games Organizing Committee, Saatchi Gallery (UK) to host a Korean banquet at the Korean Eye art exhibition attended by Cherie Blair, the wife of former UK prime minister, Tony Blair, World Trade Center in Beijing (PRC) to open a Korean food outlet and a coffee shop.

KFF also makes use of self-held events and other existing events to promote *hansik*. They participated in events by opening food booth at the Korea Brand & Entertainment Expo London, New York City Wine & Food Festival (NYCWFF), Korean food books booth at Frankfurt Book Fair 2015, and Thames Festival in the UK. During the recent NYCWFF in October 2015 in West Side Manhattan, KFF showcased Korean royal cuisine, introducing the traditional and original ingredients used by Korea’s emperors and royal family.

South Korea also chooses strategic place for its *hansik* promotion. Many major cities in the U.S., for example, have growing Koreatowns, where Korean immigrants mostly live. There, the Korean diaspora bring about

their culture and especially food. New York City, Los Angeles, Atlanta, Fort Lee, Houston are few of the cities in the U.S. with robust Koreatowns. South Korea also focused on the expansion of *hansik* in the UK, since “world prominent restaurants first open in London and then spread worldwide.” That is why, Bibigo also prioritized the expansion to the UK.

c. Partnership and Media

South Korea employs its overseas culture centers - the Korean Culture Center (KCC) - to offer non-Koreans free cooking classes. South Korea cooperated with prominent culinary academy, Le Cordon Bleu, to create French-Korean fusion food cookbook, which features recipes such as Camembert *kimchi* fritters and light *kimchi*-infused pastry cream mille-feuille. In fact, Andre Cointreau, the CEO of Le Cordon Bleu even stated that Korean “fine dining scene is ‘absolutely’ ready for a Michelin Red Guide. In 2014, Bibigo gained a two-star and was featured in 2014 London edition of Michelin guide. It is the first time a Korean restaurant received a Michelin star.

In reaching the audience, South Korea also makes use of the internet. They set up a website where the reader can get information of *hansik*, recipes of Korean traditional food, events and competition. Besides the website, they also set up a Facebook, Twitter, and Youtube account for interactive communication. KFF also launched the Menu Guide in Apple App Store and Google Play Store. The menu guide consists of various Korean dishes with its photos and descriptions in Korean, English, Japanese, and Chinese. Besides the Menu Guide, KFF also provides in Apple App Store and Google Play Store HalalKorea for Muslim travelers, providing *halal*

restaurants and travel guide, and Korean Restaurants Guide, providing recommended Korean restaurants abroad.

d. Education

South Korea set up standardized national qualification system for overseas Korean restaurants and global recommended Korean restaurant schemes. KFF issued the International Korean Menu Guide that listed an extensive variety of food, amounting to 200 varieties. On top of that, South Korea realized the need to develop the human resources in the food industry. MFAFF conducts gastrodiploamacy by partnering with travel and culinary schools to give scholarships and grants to train professional South Korean chefs and restaurateurs. KFF established specialized culinary courses at not only major Korean universities and tourism schools, but also at Le Cordon Bleu and the Culinary Institute of America. It has also initiated Korean culinary courses at foreign universities, such as Drexel University in Philadelphia, USA, which becomes the first U.S. culinary institution to offer specialized Korean culinary courses. South Korea cooperated with Bibigo to visit universities in Los Angeles and offered food samples (Zhang, 2015). KFF also held cooking class for the wives of overseas diplomatic ambassadors, so that they can also spread *hansik* in their overseas diplomatic posts.

e. Strategic People

KFF also used foreign university students living in Korea who loves Korean food. South Korea involves them in educational and cultural events, such as food tasting and culinary tours, in a program called “K-Food Supporters Alliance.” South Korea expects that these foreign students are able to introduce Korean culture to their home countries. The MFAFF also

sponsored US\$100,000 for 4 backpackers in 2011 for an 8-month trip across 15 countries to give a taste of Korea's favorite dishes to strangers they encountered in their journey. They are called Bibimbap Backpackers. Up until now, the Bibimbap Backpackers have promoted *hansik* as healthy food to 20 different countries and 40 cities for over 200 events around the world.

In 2009, Korea's first lady at that time, Kim Yoon-ok who also act as the honorary chairwoman of KFF, helped promoting *hansik* by serving food in the U.S. for the American veterans serving in the Korean War during former President Lee Myung-bak's visit. She also prepared Korean food in the ASEAN-Korea Commemorative Summit in the same year. In October 2009, First Lady Kim also gave a presentation on *hansik* for Eye on South Korea, a special feature on CNN International.

South Korea also commissioned celebrities to promote *hansik*, exploiting the Korean pop (K-pop) wave. PSY, Super Junior and Wonder Girls are they key promoters for *hansik* and Korean agricultural products. The use of celebrities by South Korea is a strategic use of famous people as their choice of celebrities are the key players of K-pop world with a large number of views on social media, like Youtube, and huge fanbase. PSY even gave lecture at Harvard University and Bibigo Bibimbap as PSY also acts as the face of the company promotion. KFF collaborated with K-pop artists to create album that promoted *hansik* through music. The use of celebrities is also incorporated in the making of MasterChef Korea Celebrities (Zhang, 2015), whose concept of the program is similar with regular MasterChef franchise, but the participants were Korean celebrities.

The promotion through the internet and television show is done through Kimchi Chronicles that documented a couple's journey to get to know and reproduce Korean dishes. A renowned three-star Michelin chef, Jean-Georges

Vongerichten and his wife Marja (who was born in Korea) explored Korean culinary heritage and roots through the traditional and home cooked meals. They also tagged along famous figures, like Hugh Jackman and Heather Graham, in their show.

South Korea's gastrodiploamacy was also creating buzz when the current first lady of the USA, Michelle Obama, tweeted about her *kimchi* making, including the *kimchi* recipe the White House used. Other than her, several Hollywood famous figures, such as Hugh Jackman, Gwyneth Paltrow, and Jessica Alba, also expressed their enjoyment of *kimchi*.

4. Comparison of the Use of Gastrodiploamacy by Malaysia and South Korea

The Similarities

1. The use of national diplomatic system

The gastrodiploamacy conducted by Malaysia and South Korea both strategically put a good use of their overseas diplomatic posts. Both gastrodiploamacy attempts use diplomatic and ambassadorial events to promote their cuisine.

2. Food events and international expos

Second, both Malaysia and South Korea held food events and participated in international events. Both also hosted meals on events attended by public figures, and used famous public figure to promote their respective cuisine.

3. Facilitating restaurateurs

Third, one of the most important part besides the promotion itself is that both governments also act as facilitators for restaurants which wants to expand overseas or wants to join their program. The governments help with

the standardization, promotion and networking. It is mutually beneficial for the restaurant owners and the governments, as the governments can have an extension for daily operation overseas and during events overseas.

4. International acknowledgement

In the world of gastrodiplomacy, it is also important to have an international recognition from a reliable source. Both Malaysia and South Korea strive to have their restaurants rated by Michelin guide and also acknowledged by UNESCO. International acknowledgment is beneficial to raise the status of the cuisine and the country in the international perspective.

5. Strategic place

In the planning of the events and activities, both Malaysia and South Korea target strategic places first. Malaysia and South Korea had many of their activities in the U.S. concentrated in New York, because New York serves as one of the lifestyle trend-setter in the U.S.

6. Local trends

Both governments also cater to the local trend, such as the food truck and fusion food trend. Even though gastrodiplomacy is bringing traditional cuisine of their home countries, Malaysia and South Korea do not forget to put concern on the different tastes and palates, thus they can attract in an appealing way.

7. Media exposure

Both governments use a great amount of media exposure, especially the use of television shows in the local targeted area to introduce and promote their cuisine.

The Differences

1. South Korea: Centralization

South Korea has a centralized and well-defined strategy. South Korea has a clearer organizational structure and responsibilities. It is expected since South Korea has its gastrodiploamacy in the context of nation rebranding program, while Malaysia's gastrodiploamacy is more toward an act to create more familiarity and awareness to promote more investments in the industry rather than a well-planned nation branding strategy.

2. South Korea: *Hallyu* wave

South Korea is in advantage since people's familiarity of the country is boosted by the *Hallyu* wave. Therefore, South Korea is able to use its pop culture figures to help promote *hansik*, and *hansik* can act to deepen the understanding of Korean culture. That is why, South Korea used many famous entertainment figures, like PSY and even made an album recording about Korean food with K-Pop artists. While in the case of Malaysia, there is not much Malaysian culture exposed to the international public, thus, Malaysian food becomes one of the primary way to engage culturally with foreign audience.

3. Malaysia: *Halal* food

While the gastrodiploamacy of South Korea is put into a more advantageous position due to the *hallyu* wave, Malaysia is advantageous due to the *halal* food. With *halal* food, Malaysia takes advantage of the growing Muslim population and lifestyle that opens opportunities for Malaysia's *halal* food export. Malaysia can target the countries with large Muslim population, or to sponsor international events that need to cater for *halal* needs.

4. South Korea: Research and development

South Korea is putting concern on the research and development of *hansik* they marketed. They conducted scientific researches with foreign research organization or university to explore the health benefits of Korean diet and to adjust *hansik* to the foreign palates.

5. Malaysia: Foodies and food bloggers

Malaysia uses the influence of foodies and food bloggers. They put up review competition of Malaysian food for foodies and food bloggers, where they need to promote and review Malaysian cuisine or restaurants, and obtain as many “likes” as possible. This is the method to attract more people in the age where community reviews and food blogging are the new normal.

6. South Korea: Education

South Korea invested in the human resource who support the gastrodiplomacy. They invested in scholarships and grants for Korean food chefs and restaurateurs development. Besides that, they also cooperate with domestic and overseas universities in opening up courses in Korean culinary.

7. South Korea: Media

South Korea is relatively more advanced in the media usage. They developed applications for smartphones for the foreign public to discover more about Korean food and where to find them in certain regions.

8. Malaysia: Hotels

Malaysia cooperated with prestigious hotel groups, the Starwood Group hotels, to serve Malaysian food for their VIP guests. This gives off a prestigious dining label towards Malaysian food, thus, promoting Malaysian food to the elites.

Conclusion

In facing the tighter global economic competition, countries should enhance their reputation through competitive identity. A correctly executed

enhancement of competitive identity leads to a stronger reputation. After recognizing their middle power position in the world economic order, strategies to enhance their competitive identity are in order. Here, gastrodiploamacy comes into the picture.

Gastrodiploamacy is meant for a long term impact by building relations and enhancing competitive identity through engagement by culinary appeal. Even though it is initiated by the government, the key participants are not solely the government itself, but it is also extended to private institutions and even individuals. The government acts as the initiator and facilitator, while the field execution, especially for daily engagement, relies on the role of private groups, such as the diaspora, restaurateurs, and food exporting companies, and individuals, like public figures and food reviewers.

As the case studies show, several impacts on the economic sector can be seen, such as from the increase in food products export and the growing popularity of the respective cuisine from Malaysia and South Korea. They also managed to be endorsed by famous public figures and conducted their events in various strategic places. The knowledge of the culinary culture of Malaysia and South Korea is definitely growing. However, to reach a long-lasting impact of an enhanced competitive identity, it takes more than just a sustainable gastrodiploamacy. Gastrodiploamacy has indeed helped increase the familiarity, popularity, exports, and added a piece of the reputation puzzle to complete the whole image of the countries. Nonetheless, in order to have an enhanced competitive identity, it also takes effort on the other sectors as well, such as the politics, foreign policy, military, environment, and many more. Gastrodiploamacy serves as the bridge to create an emotion-based engagement and connection with the people, so that negative reputation would less likely be easily accepted.

Therefore, gastrodiplomacy is a good choice to build relations with foreign public, especially for middle powers to enhance their competitive identity. Gastrodiplomacy is suitable as people connect and are more welcoming when food is the medium. Gastrodiplomacy is more than just a one-time, occasional program, but a sustained one, in order to be able to maintain and amplify the impact. Gastrodiplomacy is by no means the sole key to solve all the negative reputation and consequences resulted. It still takes a holistic effort to enhance a nation's reputation. Instead, gastrodiplomacy is there to become the bridge to reach out first, to win the hearts and minds through stomach.

	Malaysia	South Korea
Similarities	The use of national diplomatic system Joining food events and international expos Facilitating restaurateurs Gaining international acknowledgement Spotting local trends and strategic places Engaging in lots of media exposure	
Differences	Emphasizing on <i>halal</i> food Partnering with foodies, food bloggers, hotels	Centralized approach Boost from <i>hallyu</i> wave Research and development Investing in education Engaging in technology

Table 1. Result: Similarities and Differences of Malaysia and South Korea's Gastrodiplomacy

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